



Town and parish councils can work together to produce a 'cluster' neighbourhood development plan (NDP) over more than one parish area. This guide note provides more information on how to work as a cluster of parishes when developing a neighbourhood plan.

What is a parish cluster?

A parish cluster can be made up of two or more parishes who join together to develop an NDP. One of the town or parish councils will need to be identified as the legal body who is submitting the plan or development order with the consent of the other parish councils involved.

The majority of parish areas in Cornwall have a town or parish council, the communities who do not have a council will hold parish meetings. It is possible for these parish meeting areas to be included in the cluster. However, they will not be able to be the legal body that submits the plan to Cornwall Council.

Designating the Cluster

Once the area has been agreed by all the parishes in the cluster, each of them will need to write to Cornwall Council in the same way as an individual parish but include a map of the whole proposed neighbourhood area (not just their own parish).

Please refer to the guide note 'Defining the boundary' for more information on this process.

Themes

An NDP can include themes that affect all the parishes and those which affect individual parishes. It's important to note that if one parish has a policy that may be contentious, there could be a risk that it will hold up the process for the other parishes or reduce the chances of the plan being approved at the referendum. In depth consultation may be needed to gain consensus within the parish and lead to a successful referendum for the cluster as a whole.

You may want to set up working groups covering each theme in the plan when researching and collecting data during the preparation of the plan covering housing, environment, energy etc. It is important to have members of the local community and parish or town councillors on the groups to represent each of the parishes that make up the cluster.

Consultation

As with parishes that have multiple settlements, it is important to ensure that all parishes are consulted and involved throughout the process. The steering group will need to make sure that any consultations organised during the development of the neighbourhood plan is rolled out across the parishes covered by the cluster.



Terms of reference for the steering group

If you are working as a cluster, it is advisable to set out the terms of reference that each parish will work to and define how each parish will get ratification from their own town or parish council on any decisions that are made. It is also advisable that the terms of reference are agreed by each of the town or parish councils. The steering group should report to and receive endorsement from the parish councils (via a minute) on a regular basis.

The relationship between any group and the formal functions of the parish council should be transparent to the wider public. For example, it should be clear whether a steering group or other body is a formal sub-committee for the parish council. The terms of reference for a steering group or other body should be published and the minutes of meetings made available to the public.

Terms of reference for the steering group should be approved by a meeting of each of the parish councils in the cluster and should ensure that the parish councils receive regular documented reports from the steering group. Draft sections of the plan should be endorsed by the relevant council to ensure the council is fully on-board with the plan before it reaches completion.

If you would like to consider developing a neighbourhood plan as a cluster of parishes, you can contact the Neighbourhood Planning Team to discuss this further by e-mailing neighbourhoodplanning@cornwall.gov.uk.